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C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 000240

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MUSTAFA

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SUBJECT: SUBJECT: PALESTINIAN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ELECTIONS
SITREP #8: JANUARY 19, 2006

REF: JERUSALEM 00238

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Fatah and Hamas candidates in Gaza signed an agreement pledging to refrain from displaying weaponry and abide by the democratic process. Israeli and Palestinian negotiators met January 18 for additional discussions regarding Jerusalem voting. During a January 18 meeting at CEC headquarters in Ramallah, CEC Chairman Dr. Hana Nasir indicated that the Ministry of Interior had provided the CEC the PASF's security plan for the January 25 PLC elections. Fatah candidates have stepped up their campaign activities in the West Bank. A total of 45 Fatah independent candidates have withdrawn from the district races. Hamas officials published accusations claiming that PLC candidate Muhammad Dahlan is corrupt and collaborates with Israeli security officials. END SUMMARY.

Election Day Security

¶2. (C) During a January 18 meeting at CEC headquarters in Ramallah with Consul General, CEC Chairman Dr. Hana Nasir indicated that the Ministry of Interior had provided the CEC the PASF's security plan for the January 25 PLC elections (details of plan in reftel). Nasir expressed concern, however, about the effectiveness of the PASF on Election Day.

He worried in particular about a breakdown in communication between the security personnel in the field and their commanders. The Consul General responded that USG officials relayed messages to Abu Mazen, Nasir Yusif and all security chiefs that everything must be done to secure the elections. Nasir urged that this message be repeated to the PA through Election Day.

¶3. (C) Nasir also indicated that the CEC was requesting that the PA move PASF voting forward one day to begin on January 21, in order to allow for PASF enough time to return to their posts on January 24. CEC Chief Electoral Officer Ammar Dweik said the GOI needed to facilitate the movement of the PASF in the West Bank. Dweik indicated that there were several hundred West Bank PASF personnel who should return to the Gaza Strip to vote. The Consul General encouraged Dweik to coordinate that movement of those required to vote in Gaza.

Progress on Jerusalem
Voting Modalities

¶4. (C) Israeli and Palestinian negotiators met January 18 for additional discussions regarding Jerusalem voting. According to ConGen contacts, both sides have reached consensus on most

of the modalities for voting in six East Jerusalem post offices. According to the agreed arrangements, the CEC will open three offices in East Jerusalem to issue 6,000 & tickets to potential voters using the same eligibility standards required of East Jerusalem residents who would otherwise vote outside the municipal boundaries of the city. The tickets would be color-coded for one of the six post offices. On Election Day, the voter will present the ticket at the post office, which will then be able to match the ticket to information provided by the CEC. Indelible ink placed on the finger of each voter to prevent double voting. In addition, Israel agreed to return all material.

¶15. (C) Israel has also agreed to refrain from entering the three CEC offices, except in an emergency. The offices distributing the tickets will display no PA or CEC signs. The Israeli representatives agreed to provide answers to additional requests, including a letter of assurance that there would be no retribution against voters and a CEC request that postal clerks comply with PA law and stamp ballots when issued. (Note: Neither side raised the issue of Hamas participation. Dr. Hana Nasir told the Consul General that the CEC would not make an issue of it, but warned that he would cancel the PLC elections if Israel attempted to tamper with the ballots on Election Day. End note.

Fatah and Hamas Agree not to
Display Weapons

¶16. (C) Fatah and Hamas agreed to refrain from displaying weapons on Election Day. PLC candidates Said Siyam (Hamas) and Samir Mashhari (Fatah) signed a document on January 18 in Gaza stipulating that both sides will abide by the Elections Law, compete democratically and respect the results. The document also states that the two sides will cooperate with the PASF to secure polling stations and form joint committees to oversee the election process.

Fatah Increasing
Campaign Activity

¶17. (C) Fatah has noticeably increased campaign activities ahead of the January 25 PLC elections. Fatah activists in the West Bank and Gaza have been reaching out to disillusioned Fatah members and the general public through text messaging and other media communications. In the northern West Bank districts of Jenin and Tulkarem, Fatah activists are conducting a door-to-door mobilization campaign. Al-Aqsa Brigades in Nablus released a statement backing down on its threat to attack polling stations in the city. Senior PA security officials and Fatah leaders have been in contact with potentially problematic elements of al-Aqsa Brigades in various areas to ensure security on Election Day.

Fatah Independent Candidates
Withdrawal From District Races

¶18. (C) Salah Shadid, a Brigadier General in the PA General Intelligence, pulled out of the Tulkarem district race. Dr. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Turk, a Fatah independent candidate and lecturer at al-Najah university pulled out from the race in Salfit district race. A total of 45 Fatah independents have pulled out of the district races, bettering Fatah's chances in district races.

Hamas and Dahlan
Trade Insults

¶19. (C) Hamas has established a link on its website attacking PLC candidate Muhammad Dahlan. The link displays pictures of Dahlan with Israeli officials and implies that he is an Israeli security agent. The link also contains articles

accusing Dahlan of assisting in the IDF missile strike that killed 'Abd al-Aziz Rantisi in Gaza two years ago, questions the origins of Dahlan's extensive wealth and alleges that Dahlan led a mutiny against Arafat in 2004. Dahlan has attacked Hamas repeatedly during election speeches describing Hamas as a force of darkness lacking a coherent vision for the Palestinian national cause.

PFLP Activists Arrested in
East Jerusalem

¶ 10. (C) The Israeli police arrested seven PFLP activists on January 18, including one PLC candidate, at a hotel in East Jerusalem. Some of the activists, who were arrested while conducting a rally at al-Dar hotel, resisted the police. Police officials said that they would continue to prevent any attempt to halt any campaigning by PFLP in the city. Among those arrested were: 'Abd al-Latif Ghaith, Hani Issawi-independent supported by DFLP, Maha Nassar on the PFLP national list and Fadwa Khader a People Party) running as independent in East Jerusalem district.

Fatah Ahead of
Hamas in Polls

¶ 11. (C) A poll published by the Palestinian Center for Public Opinion on January 18 said that 36 percent of eligible voters intend to vote for the Fatah national list and 27 percent will vote for Hamas in the upcoming Palestinian parliament elections. The poll also showed that approximately 80 percent of Palestinians favor resuming negotiations with Israel.

Press Coverage

-- Al-Quds provided coverage of U.S. Senator John Kerry's visit to Jericho, including a photograph of the Senator with PLO Chief Negotiator Sa'eb Erakat as he spoke to the press following their meeting. Kerry spoke about the upcoming legislative elections.

Op-eds:

-- Ya'qoub Al-Atrash commented in Al-Quds that foreign intervention in the PLC elections was unacceptable, noting in particular that "U.S. Secretary of State Rice's recent obligation that Palestinian candidates give up weapons and recognize Israel...seem very awkward.⁸

-- Hasan Asfour wrote in Al-Ayyam that he was awaiting January 26 for the results of the PLC elections, adding that &admitting political facts is not a mishap or a taboo; on the contrary, overlooking the reality can be a political mistake.⁸ Asfour maintained that the next legislative council, through its role and action, will be a continuity to the first council, since the first council was the outcome of the Oslo Agreement.

-- Al-Quds ran a political cartoon showing a man about to cast his vote in a balloting box with his face directed toward a cracked ceiling with the words: &Under the Oslo ceiling⁸ written underneath it.

-- Al-Quds carried a front-page story was a denial by the "Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine" that any of its political or military members are running for legislative elections. Nafeth Azzam, an active Islamic Jihad leader, re-affirmed the movement's clear position of completely rejecting the legislative elections and requiring all Islamic Jihad affiliated groups and institutions to boycott them.

-- Al-Quds also reported that during a meeting organized by the &Coalition for Jerusalem⁸ candidates on various electoral lists asked the PA and Palestinian negotiators to

clarify the electoral procedures in Jerusalem.

Op-eds:

-- In its main editorial, Al-Quds opined that the next Palestinian cabinet should primarily consist of youth, for they are better experienced and more capable to lead.

-- Khalid Al-Huroub commented in al-Quds that the forthcoming elections would be an element in the promotion of Palestinian legitimacy and a direct factor in stopping the ongoing state of anarchy in the Palestinian areas.

-- Veteran columnist Talal Okal commented in al-Ayyam that over 90 percent of the new PLC will be controlled by partisan politics.

-- Mohammad Yaghi maintained in al-Ayyam that Hamas, political platform does not greatly differ from that of Fatah, including the removal of the &destruction of Israel& objective from its electoral campaign.

-- Al-Hayat al-Jadida,s editor in-chief, Hafez Barghouthi, wrote that the next PLC will better reflect &real parliamentary life& and will be a much better counter-balance to the executive branch.

WALLES